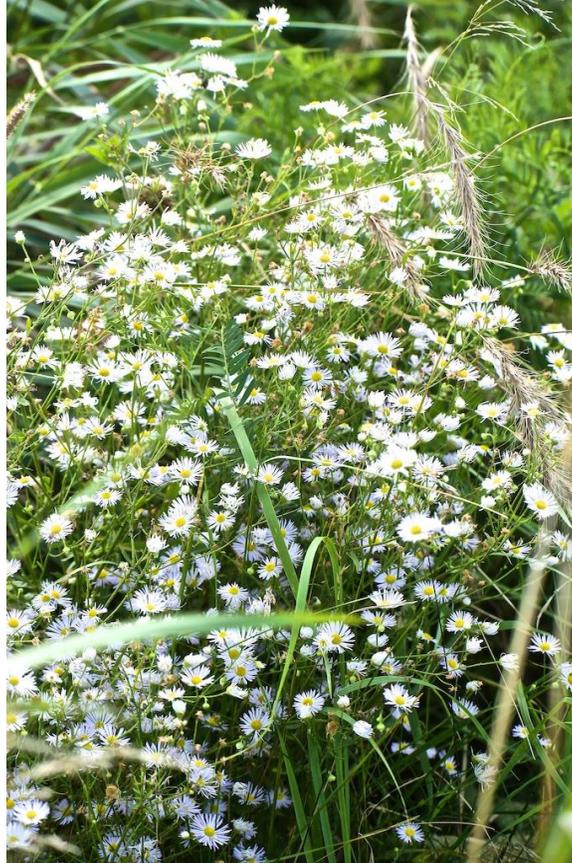


## DECEMBER 1 - 14, 2015 NATURAL HISTORY NOTES FOR EASTVIEW

By Dick Harlow

### **SMALL WHITE ASTER**



**Small White Aster** *Aster vimineus* taken in September  
Photo © Dick Harlow

Although the meadow and field are brown at this time of year, it still allows for discussion about common viewable plants that are on our property; thus discussion about the Small White Aster.

When walking along the edges of our uncut field and meadow you can see from August to October *Aster vimineus*. It looks like a small bush with many white blooms, but upon looking closer you can see a bunch of small daisy like flowers with yellow centers as seen in the next photograph. This plant's common name is Small White Aster. The plant is no higher than 5 feet with small leaves and also small flowers only ½ inch wide with yellow centers; very easy to recognize amongst the tall grasses of our field and meadow. However, the plants I've measured so far have only been around 3 feet. Other asters that are blooming in August – October are usually colored deep purple or a light blue and have larger flowers. Many white daisies and early asters have either finished flowering or are almost done by the end of August.



**Small White Aster** *Aster vimineus* taken in October  
Photo © Dick Harlow

These flowering asters are native to eastern North America from eastern Canada to Arkansas and Florida. The fact that the flowers are mainly white and that the plant has divergent branches aids in this species identification. Sometimes you will see purple stems on these plants amongst the white flowers.

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There are about 75 species of asters in the eastern part of North America. These wildflowers tend to bloom in the fall so be careful not to confuse the fall asters with the daisies that bloom in the spring. Some asters are fairly easy to identify, like the large dark purple New England Aster, but many are difficult without checking the many aspects of the plant to a key or handbook. There are many good keys and wildflower field guides available today.

### Galium Sphinx Moth



**Galium Sphinx Moth, *Hyles gallii***

Photo © Dick Harlow

Although this moth was seen during the day, most moths fly at night. This Galium Sphinx Moth, also known as Bedstraw Hawkmoth was found on a door panel here at EastView. This is an uncommon moth here, but does live in northern latitudes around the world. There are 125 species of Sphinx Moths in North America.

This adult moth can be seen flying about during the day or in your garden feeding on Monarda species, or Wild Bergamot. Also you might see it on phlox, Sweet William, lilacs or butterfly bush. This moth is sometimes confused with hummingbirds or the Hummingbird Clearwing Moth. Although seen throughout the world at our latitude, it is uncommon enough that seeing it attached to a door panel was quite a treat.

The larval stage of this moth has a harmless red or black "horn" at the hind-end, or if you will the posterior end of a finger sized large worm-like caterpillar. The coloring of these caterpillars can be quite varied ranging between brown, green or black. The caterpillar has a red head and legs with yellowish spots along the sides. Because of the horn that projects up at the end, these caterpillars are called hornworms. However, there are many different species of moths whose caterpillars are found in this group.

Sphinx moth caterpillars feed on a variety of plants. The Galium Sphinx feeds on bedstraw, Fireweed, *Epilobium angustifolium* also known as willow herb, woodruff and godetia. Godetia is a spring blooming western annual.

If you see a hornworm it probably belongs to the sphinx family of moths, but they are harmless. If you disturb it the worm might rear up and act as if it was

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something to avoid. Not so, but this behavior is a good example of how evolution has helped this animal. Most other animals would see this behavior as a poisonous threat and leave, and not mess with this caterpillar. In fact hornworms of the sphinx family of moths are harmless.

### **NOTE: WILD BIRD FEEDING**

Relative to bird feeding and the lack of birds here at EastView during the end of October and the beginning of November, some residents might be interested in this note taken from MA Bird and the accompanying article.

If you do a search on "does feeding birds make them dependent" you'll find 22 million hits, and the first few pages state that it does not make them dependent, and several pages cite a research paper that shows birds rely on feeders for less than 25% of what they eat. Here's an article that talks about this. <http://archive.audubonmagazine.org/backyard/backyard0001.html>

### **DO YOU KNOW WHO I AM?**

#### **WHAT IS MY NAME?**



Photo © Dick Harlow

The answer will be in the December 15-31 Notes.

### **Weather Tidbits**

**December 1-14, 2015**

All Measurements taken at solar noon (1130 EST).

#### **PRECIPITATION**

**Precipitation was: 28.4 mm or 1.1 inches.**

**Overcast Days: 9**

#### **WIND**

**Highest wind: 24 MPH, 11 Dec. Direction: South**

**Average Wind speed: 2.3 mph,**

**Dominate Wind Direction: South**

**Days w/wind gusts 20-29 MPH: 2**

**Days w/wind gusts 30 MPH or greater: 0**

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**TEMPERATURE**

Mean Temp: 10.3 C° 50.5 °F

High Temp: 24.6 C° 76.3 °F

Low Temp: -2.8 C° 27 °F

**0.0 C° - Temperature Days: (less 32°F)**

MAX <= 0.0: 0

MIN <= 0.0: 1